

Testimony

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

March 15, 2010

HB5027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT HEALTH CENTER'S FACILITIES PLAN

Senator Handley, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Dr. Carolyn Runowicz and I am a resident of Avon. I am a practicing surgeon, GYN oncologist and the Director of the Carole and Ray Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Connecticut Health Center. I am here today to speak in support of **HB5027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT HEALTH CENTER'S FACILITIES PLAN**

As a UConn faculty member, administrator, practicing physician, educator and researcher I am in full support of the plan to renew John Dempsey Hospital and the associated clinical facilities essential for attracting and retaining faculty and supporting the academic mission of the Health Center.

As Director of the Cancer Center, I am speaking on behalf of the members of the cancer center in strong support of a National Cancer Institute, (NCI) - supported Comprehensive Cancer Center. Our vision is to develop a Northern/Central Connecticut Regional Cancer Center that provides excellence in cancer prevention, diagnostic and therapeutic services, as well as a comprehensive array of clinical trials, translational and basic science research, community services and medical education for the residents of Northern/Central Connecticut.

The state of CT needs to invest in a state cancer institute to accelerate progress in cancer prevention, early detection and novel therapies ("personalized" oncology). The University of CT Health Center (UCHC), with partners at Hartford Hospital (HH), Saint Francis Hospital (SFH) and The Hospital of Central Connecticut (THOCC) and others can create a regional comprehensive cancer institute to meet these goals by enhancing discovery, innovation and delivery of improved cancer care, screening and prevention. This inter-institutional enterprise will unite all of the cancer research efforts and clinical programs in the greater Hartford area by pooling the experience and expertise at each hospital into a regional enterprise, which will improve efficiency in research and in the delivery of cancer care.

Clinical programs and clinical research can be strengthened by developing novel therapies and expanding the regional delivery system. A Phase I/II clinical trials NCI-supported program in collaboration with Storrs (School of Pharmacy) and industry (biotech and pharmaceutical companies) needs to be developed. In addition, there is a need for a regional cancer transplant (bone marrow/ stem cell) program and regional cancer clinical trials network. Such a network will facilitate the delivery of novel therapies into the community to optimize cancer outcomes. In collaborating with Hartford Hospital's NCI designated Community Cancer Centers Pilot program and in reaching the inner city populations served by SFH and THOCC, these therapies can be made available to the underserved in the greater Hartford catchment area.

The benefits of a regional cancer center:

- Reduced overall regional expenses to provide diagnostic and therapeutic cancer services which will avoid duplication of expensive services and equipment.
- Improved regional access for all patients to a vast array of clinical trials, translational and basic science research efforts.
- Comprehensive prevention, diagnostic and therapeutic cancer services.
- Improved access to faculty expertise for all types of cancer and hematologic disorders.
- Improved patient/community access to support services including social workers, nutritionist, psychologists, complementary medicine, pain management, palliative care, and patient navigators.
- Enhanced educational opportunities for medical education and medical support disciplines.
- Focused philanthropic giving for the good of the citizens of the region.

Through its designation as an NCI Comprehensive Cancer Center, it will attract outstanding oncologists, cancer researchers, patients and donors. On average, NCI designated cancer centers generate significant federal and private-sector funding in support of the research and delivery of patient care. This in turn results in job creation. This center will work with the Connecticut Institute for Clinical and Translational Science in support of research and community outreach.